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United States Department of Agriculture



HIKING

FOUR PASS LOOP– West Maroon to Buckskin

Length: 28 miles round-trip (45.1 km)

Difficulty: Difficult

Trail Use: Moderate

Beginning Elevation: 9,580 feet (2920 m)

Highest Elevation: 12,500 feet (3810 m)

USGS Map(s): Maroon Bells; Snowmass Mtn.

PERMIT INFORMATION: In order to provide quality recreation experiences and to protect the wilderness lands the Forest Service must gather data regarding visitor use and travel patterns. **Each party overnighiting** in the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness is **required to self-register at the Trailhead and to carry a copy of the registration with them** during their visit. There is no fee charged and no limit to the number of permits issued.

DAY/BACKPACKING OVERVIEW: An ambitious backpacking trip located in the beautiful Maroon Bells/Snowmass Wilderness that is routed over four mountain passes (West Maroon - 12,500 ft.; Frigid Air - 12,415 ft.; Trail Rider - 12,420 ft.; Buckskin - 12,500 ft.). The variety of terrain encompasses scenic forests, mid to late summer wildflowers, challenging river crossings, and provides spectacular views of the Maroon Bells and numerous other peaks of the Elk Mountain Range. **When camping in the Wilderness, campsites must be located 100 feet from any body of water or trail or at a designated campsite. Start your hike early as thunderstorms are common on the passes in early afternoon. Wading rivers or streams in early summer can be treacherous. Sandals or boat shoes are strongly recommended. Wading barefoot can be extremely dangerous. Be sure to unbuckle your pack when navigating any stream crossing.**

ACCESS: Drive 1/2 mile west of Aspen on Highway 82 to the Roundabout . Go around the Roundabout and turn right onto Maroon Creek Road. Drive 9-1/2 miles on Maroon Creek Road to the overnight parking lot just below Maroon Lake. This is located on the left side of the road. Access to this lot after 8:30 AM requires a stop at the Forest Service Entrance Station on Maroon Creek Road for an overnight pass. If the lot is full you may drive 1/4 mile down the road to the West Maroon Portal parking lot.

NARRATIVE: Use the trail guide for West Maroon Trail to West Maroon Pass until you reach the pass. From the top of the pass a series of switchbacks descends from a steep scree field into meadows of magnificent wildflowers before the trail reaches the valley floor. A scattering of campsites can be found on shelves during this descent. A mile below the pass the trail intersects with the Frigid Air Pass Trail. Go right.

The trail continues through a valley of wildflowers and ascends steeply for about 1 mile toward a series of ridges. Frigid Air Pass can be seen through a gap just past the ridges. The trail continues straight to a broad saddle leading to Hasley Basin. After passing a small pond it turns right and ascends a steep incline. A trail sign marks this turn. The pass is reached through a series of very steep switchbacks. From the pass Fravert Basin can be seen as well as the back side of the Maroon Bells.

The descent from the pass is via a series of steep switchbacks which lead into a more gradual descent through wildflowers and alpine scrub. As the trail enters a spruce forest, it begins another steep descent toward the North Fork of the Crystal River. As the trail follows the river through the spruce forest, good campsites can be found. Remember to camp 100 feet from both the stream and the trail. About 1-1/2 miles farther the trail begins a series of steep switchbacks following the rapidly falling stream which becomes a magnificent waterfall when it enters the gorge. In another mile the trail branches just after a small clearing.

The left fork leads to camping at the Love's Cabin area. The Four Pass Loop Trail, although poorly defined, turns right and heads toward the North Fork of the Crystal River. After crossing the Fork, continue for 3/4 of a mile into a spruce forest. As you leave the woods take the right fork marked by a sign and head toward Trail Rider Pass. The trail ascends steeply through open meadows and aspen for 1-1/2 miles then reaches a stream where it forks to the right. The left fork goes to Geneva Lake. Follow the trail crossing the stream several times then ascending to the top of a ridge on the right. From here, the trail winds around a small lake and the pass is clearly visible. After reaching Trail Rider Pass, Snowmass Lake can be seen below.

The trail descends to the lake switchbacking through alpine meadows to the ridge above the lake. Follow the trail which continues to descend to the east side of the lake. At the far end of the lake a trail intersection goes left to the campsites. Continue straight and immediately cross a small stream. About 200 yards ahead is the intersection for the Maroon-Snowmass Trail. The trail heads right, toward Buckskin Pass, by descending through a forest then into a meadow where the back of the Maroon Bells can be seen. Soon the trail crosses Snowmass Creek. Stay on the main trail which bears left and steadily ascends, steeply switchbacking, up to the top of a ridge. About 1-1/2 miles after the Snowmass Creek crossing, the trail crosses two small streams at timberline. This may be a good place to camp as campsites are not available until after crossing Buckskin Pass and entering Minnehaha Gulch. Buckskin Pass can be seen on the ridge to the left of the large boulders. The trail ascends switchbacking through an alpine meadow. The final ascent to the ridge is via a very long switchback. The ridge offers spectacular views of Snowmass Mountain, Snowmass Lake, Capitol Peak and Mt. Daly. Buckskin Pass is just ahead.

As the trail crosses the pass, Pyramid Peak and Maroon Bells (on the right) can be seen. The trail descends through a series of steep switchbacks to the alpine meadow below. Follow the trail through the meadows until it reaches a trail sign for the Maroon-Snowmass/Willow Lake Trail junction. Take the right fork. Continue through the meadow for about 1/2 of a mile to enter Minnehaha Gulch. Camping can be found here and is prohibited in the alpine meadow. Follow the trail which descends steeply through the gulch where it crosses a stream about 1/2 of a mile further. The trail continues to descend steeply through the gulch, enters a spruce forest and eventually a stand of aspen trees. Upon entering the aspen forest, Crater Lake will be visible to the right. Continue on the trail to where it intersects with the West Maroon Trail at a Forest Service bulletin board. Take the left fork continuing on the Maroon-Snowmass Trail for 1-3/4 miles to Maroon Lake and the end of a grand adventure.

ETHICS/REGULATIONS: The Four Pass Loop is within the Maroon Bell-Snowmass Wilderness, please educate yourself about Wilderness Ethics and the following rules:

- * **DOGS MUST BE LEASHED** out of consideration for both other people and wildlife.
- * Limit group sizes to 10 people and 15 stock/pack animals.
- * **SANITATION** - bury human waste 100 feet from water and 6 inches in the soil.
- * Lightweight campstoves are recommended and required above the timberline.

PACK IT IN—PACK IT OUT!! LEAVE NO TRACE!!

WILDERNESS AREAS are in a delicate state of natural balance, they are not renewable resources. Any careless act by man can upset this natural balance and result in destruction of the beauty found in the Wilderness. By following the above ethics and regulations you can help protect and preserve the natural features of the wilderness for future visits. **PLEASE RESPECT THE LAND AND RIGHTS OF OTHERS!**

ASPEN-SOPRIS RANGER DISTRICT WHITE RIVER NATIONAL FOREST FOUR PASS LOOP



Four Pass Loop



White River
National Forest

Recommended Campsites - West Maroon

— Streams

— Trails

CAMPSITE

▲ NO Campfires

▲ Campfire OK

Site 1.
106°58'20.221"W
39°3'57.972"N

Site 2.
106°58'13.94"W
39°3'57.181"N

Site 3.
106°58'17.553"W
39°3'42.088"N

Site 4.
106°58'24.888"W
39°3'36.692"N

Site 5.
106°58'26.23"W
39°3'33.635"N

Site 6.
106°58'23.575"W
39°3'31.454"N

Site 7.
106°58'30.208"W
39°3'22.744"N

Site 8.
106°58'51.939"W
39°2'57.188"N

This is a graphical representation
of recommended camps only.
Follow all posted regulations
when choosing a campsite

